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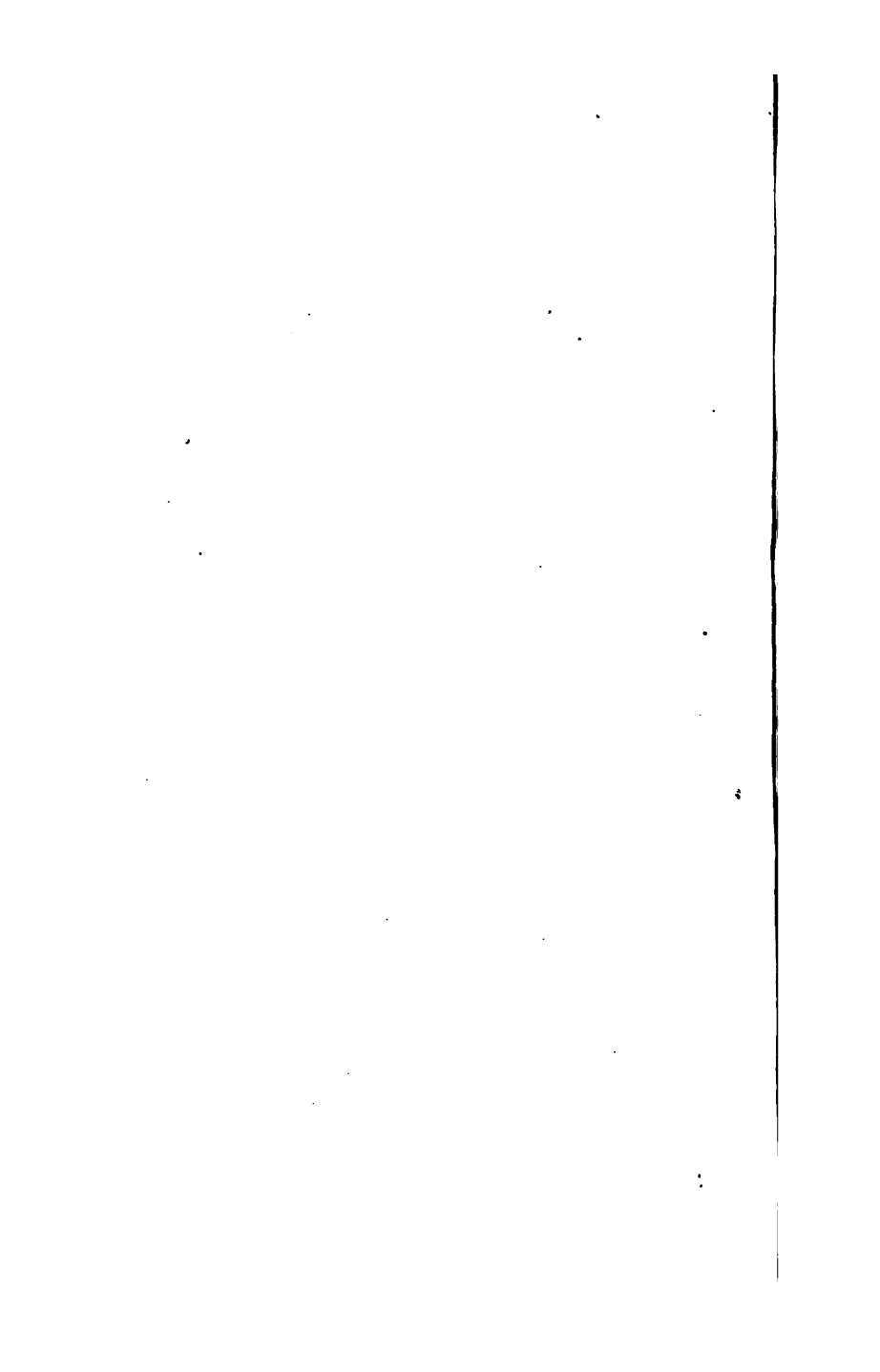
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THE

DUTIES OF PARENTS:

A

DISCOURSE,

PREACHED IN CHRIST CHURCH, CINCINNATI,
JANUARY 17, 1831.

BY

REV. B. P. AYDELOTT,
RECTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

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A DISCOURSE, &c.

“Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Eph. vi. 4.

THERE are certain relations in life, which give an influence so obvious and great, that the most thoughtless cannot be ignorant of it. Among these, it will undoubtedly be admitted, is the *parental relation*. Every one is aware, that Fathers and Mothers have much influence over their children; and I am disposed to believe, that there are few parents, however heedless and corrupt, who do not feel, at times, that in the exercise of this influence there is involved a very serious accountability. I was forcibly impressed with the truth of this remark, the other day, in reading the account of a little incident that occurred in the life of the lamented Bishop Heber. An old man, of notoriously wicked life, who resided in the parish of Hodnet, of which Heber was the minister, placed his little grandson, the only surviving member of his family, under the instructions of Heber; and when asked what could have induced him to take such a step—the old man replied: “Why not? Do you think I wish Phil. to be as bad as myself? I’m black enough, God knows!”

But, though, my beloved hearers, there are few parents, however bad, who do not wish their children to be better than they themselves are,—yet, is it not too true, that most even of Christian fathers and mothers, do not feel as they ought the solemn responsibility which the parental relation devolves upon them? Hence the lamentable extent to which the duties of parents are neglected, or very imperfectly performed. And could that fearful amount of sin and misery, which every where burdens, and pollutes, and oppresses the human family, be traced to its legitimate sources, much the largest portion, I am persuaded, would be found to have originated in parental folly and negligence. Were this fountain of evil once thoroughly purified, our world would speedily present a far different and happier aspect. Doubtless many of you desire to bring about so goodly a result. And to such I would say that, in this case, as well as in most other efforts to benefit society, it is best and indeed absolutely necessary (if we would accomplish much) to begin with ourselves:—and therefore, equally for my own sake, and yours, I now ask your attention to these words of holy scripture—“Bring them up,” *i. e.* your children, “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

THE DUTIES OF PARENTS TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN,
AND HOW THESE DUTIES ARE TO BE DISCHARGED, will
constitute the topics of the present Discourse.

As we wish to take an extended view of this subject, so it cannot be expected that we go much into the several particulars which it embraces. We may however hereafter, from time to time, as the Lord permits, take

up each of these particulars as a distinct topic of discourse.

- I. That Fathers and Mothers may properly understand their duties towards their children, and be prepared to discharge them,—THEY OUGHT TO GET CLEAR AND CORRECT VIEWS OF THEIR SITUATION AS PARENTS.

You are the divinely appointed, sole, and supreme governors of ~~your~~ children. Your authority, as parents, was not derived from your children;—they never delegated to you the power to rule over them,—and therefore they have no right to call you to an account for your conduct, neither should they ever be permitted to take the reins out of your hands. I know of no government so unquestionable as that of parents. The nearest resemblance to the absolute sovereignty of Jehovah over his creatures, is the dominion of Fathers and Mothers over their children. In your family you ought to acknowledge no superior but God; and if you respect yourselves, and regard the welfare of your children, you will suffer no one to interfere in the management of them.

Brethren, I am not an advocate for unreasonable, despotic sway in the family circle. No: it is to prevent tyranny, the worst of all tyranny—*the tyranny of spoiled children over their weak parents*;—and it is to keep out the odious tyranny of foreign intrusion upon domestic discipline, that I would seek to establish the rightful authority of parents. From the mastery of children over the Father and Mother, and from extraneous interference in family government, only evil, and sore evil, will arise. Misrule and misery must be the lot of those households

where these things are permitted;—but a well regulated parental control is the most fruitful source of order, virtue, and happiness.

How often do we hear parents, when grieving over the ruin of a child, pour out such complaints as these : “He would always have his own way!” or—“His uncle, or his grandmother, so spoiled him, that I feared it would come to this!” But whose fault was it that the unhappy child always had his own way? And is it possible that parental responsibilities can be so easily transferred to others? Be assured, my friends, that ~~such~~ waywardness and such interference will seldom occur, without arguing a culpable weakness on the part of the parents.

Fathers and Mothers must take a clear and correct view of their *situation* as parents. They must feel their independence of all within and without their households: they must feel their sole, solemn, and immovable obligations to God to govern well their own family, before they can be prepared properly to discharge their duties towards their children.

II. If you would “bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” you must EVER BEAR IN MIND THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE TO THE CHARACTER AND WELFARE OF YOUR CHILDREN. >

I use the term *influence* here in its largest acceptation, to embrace all that moral power which emanates from the spirit you breathe,—your conversation, your whole example, and all the regulations of your family government. These things, singly and combined, are con-

stantly exerting an influence for evil or for good, which must tell upon the lives and destinies of your children.

You wish, parents, that your beloved children should be a credit and a comfort to you,—should attain to respectability as members of the community and of future families: in a word, that they should be useful and happy. But have you ever considered that, whether their character and condition shall be such or directly the reverse, depends, under heaven, almost altogether upon *yourselves*? Yes! your principles, your conduct, your character, are now moulding those of your children. And therefore writers on political economy have laid it down as a maxim, and correctly laid it down,—that families are, in a moral point of view, the nurseries of the State: but with that book in our hands which reveals the divine economy and its solemn issues, we can give such an amplitude to this maxim as must confer an unspeakably greater importance on parental influence;—Each family is a nursery of heaven, or of hell. Every Father and Mother are bringing up their children for endless happiness or everlasting woe. *Parental influence, parental influence*, embraces all time, and reaches forward through eternity. And, O, how often is the serious observer pained, as he goes from house to house of the respectable and the wise of this world, to discover most sure indications that the children are, one and all, thronging onward after their Fathers and Mothers in that “broad way which leadeth to destruction!”

And may it not, my hearers, be safely asserted that, in no part of the world is parental influence of more importance than in these United States? We may have hundreds of laws; but public sentiment is, after all, the great law of our land. The wisest legislation among us

is utterly powerless, unless sustained by public opinion. This must give life and strength to our statute book,—otherwise it remaineth a dead letter, neither felt nor feared. Now what is public sentiment other than a combination of family judgments? And who has so great a weight in the formation of these domestic decisions as parents? Whether then our country is to be overspread with a vitiated or a virtuous public sentiment,—whether we are to be a dissolute nation, or a people “fearing God and working righteousness,”—mainly depends upon the proper employment of parental influence.

Such then is the power of Fathers and Mothers in the State;—and, I will venture to say, it is not less in the Church. By the influence of their family instructions, their prayers, and their example, they may so prepare the minds of their children as to give a wonderful efficiency and success to a preached gospel. But without this parental preparation, ministers may be as wise as Solomon, fearless as Daniel, and devoted as Paul, and yet their labors be nearly in vain. What is the reason, that so many of our youth of both sexes are found in places of corrupting public amusements, and thronging the giddy vortex of fashion and of folly, while so few are seen devoting themselves to God their Saviour? Doubtless the larger portion of the sin lieth at the door of parents. Are you a Father? Are you a mother? Reflect, I beseech you, on the importance of your influence to the character and welfare of your children. To what a solemn extent does it rest with you, parents, whether your dear children shall grow up useful, respected and happy, and be for ever blessed,—or, be miserable themselves, and pests to society; and at last lie down in the cursed abode of sin and despair!

III. No child was ever yet brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord without PRAYER.

Where a parent is really concerned for the happiness of his children here and hereafter, and is awakened to the importance of his influence over them, and reflects upon his responsibility,—so many solemn thoughts will cross his mind, and so many anxious feelings possess his bosom, that he can find no relief but in pouring out his full heart before God. Properly to discharge his duties, he will feel that he needs wisdom, and watchfulness, and patience, and firmness:—that he needs the spirit of love and of a sound mind: and where can he go for these but to a Throne of grace? And after he has done all he can do, he will still see that, in every point he has fallen short; and he will be sensible also, that his best exertions can be of real benefit to his children, only so far as they are blessed of God. And therefore such a parent will pray, not only for himself but with his children also. In family prayer, both parents and children will find that preparation of mind and heart which is necessary to qualify them for their duties to each other; but *without the aid of the domestic altar, religious education is nearly a hopeless task.**

But, besides prayer for himself, and prayer in his family, the christian parent will find it of unspeakable ad-

* If there is any one particular on which I would have wished to have dwelt more fully and earnestly, it is the above. But no language can adequately express the importance of the family altar as a means of the religious education of children: to be thoroughly understood it must be *experienced*. How questionable is that parent's profession of religion, who neglects the daily morning and evening worship of God in his household!

vantage, occasionally to take each of his children apart in a room with him, and make that child the subject of special prayer. A pious individual, of whom I have somewhere read, speaking of his preservation amid the ensnaring and tempting scenes through which he had passed, assigned this, as the principal means of his deliverance. When I was a child (as far back as I can recollect, said he) my mother used daily at a certain hour, to take me into her room, and kneeling down with me, would put her hand on my head, and supplicate the blessing of Heaven upon me. As I advanced in life, and after my mother had gone to her rest, I fell into evil company and was in great danger of ruin. Still, wherever I might be, as a certain hour came round each day, there was something associated with that hour, which I could never shake off. I felt my pious mother's hand on my head,—and, blessed be God, it was my preservation. It restrained me : I could not rush headlong into wickedness, as others did!

IV. Children should be **EARLY INSTRUCTED IN THE DOCTRINES AND DUTIES OF RELIGION.**

It is a great and a most injurious mistake, to suppose that little children cannot understand the truths of the gospel. So far from this, my experience has satisfied me, that they are vastly more susceptible of religious instruction than adults; because their minds have not been so sophisticated by worldly association.* I believe

* Certainly, the Scriptures represent the *wisdom of this world* as opposed to the wisdom of God; and that so far as the heart is under the power of the former, it is *blinded* to the latter.

therefore, that *every day a parent puts off the religious instruction of his children, the difficulties of the work increase. Their minds will become pre-occupied with a thousand prejudices against "the truth;"*—and a multitude of corrupt feelings will be strengthened, and evil habits formed: all of which will operate as so many barriers to keep out the influence of piety from the heart. Be assured, Fathers and Mothers, if you neglect your work, the great enemy will not neglect his. He is always very busy about your children; and God hath set you especially as their natural guardians, to preserve them from the devices of the Evil One!

1. That your children may be early instructed in the doctrines and duties of Christianity, besides your costly family Bible, provide one of a cheaper kind, so that they may not be afraid to use it. Let it be so placed that they can all have easy access to it; and let it be understood that you give to each of them the privilege of reading in it every day.

2. In addition to the Scriptures put into the hands of your children the volumes of the American Tract Society: these form of themselves a large and most interesting fund of instruction.

3. Let them read also the Lives of Henry Martyn, Claudius Buchanan, Legh Richmond, and other christian worthies, who have exemplified and adorned the religion of the Bible.

4. As they advance, procure for them Scott's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, and the Rev. Henry Venn's Complete Duty of Man.

5. You will find it of great advantage also, to introduce into your family some of the excellent religious periodicals of the day,—as, The New-York Observer, or The

Episcopal Recorder. Your children will always peruse these with great interest; and, besides the religious instruction which such reading conveys, it will make your children, in point of general intelligence, far superior to others of the same age, who are without this advantage.

6. Be sure to give your children the privileges of the whole of the Lord's day. I say, the *whole* of the Lord's day; because, however careful you may be to bring them to the house of God in the morning, yet if they are permitted to spend the rest of the day in idleness, or worldly works, visits, or amusements, or in wandering from church to church, nearly every good impression will be effaced as fast as it is made.

What, among other reasons, must show the paramount importance of public worship in the religious education of children, is the fact that, it is almost the only means of such instruction which many of them enjoy.

One of the best methods you can employ to render your children attentive to a preached gospel, is, occasionally, to put to them, when you return from church, a few plain questions on the subject of the discourse. Children, no more than adults, do not like to be found ignorant of what they ought to know; and therefore, to save their feelings this mortification, they will generally take heed to what they hear, when they have reason to expect that an account of it will be required of them.

7. There is one means of religious education peculiar to this age, of which the parent who neglects its advantages, does great injustice to himself and his children: I allude to SUNDAY SCHOOLS. These institutions are, undoubtedly, the most valuable auxiliary ever invented by man to aid Fathers and Mothers in the great work of bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition

of the Lord. It would indeed be a difficult matter to decide to whom Sunday Schools have proved the richest source of blessing,—to children, teachers, or parents. What multitudes of the former have there obtained that instruction, of all others the most precious, but of which they would otherwise have been nearly destitute! How many teachers can trace their first serious impressions to the period when they found themselves surrounded by their little charge! And how many parents have reason to bless and praise God on *their own account*, that their children have been brought under the influence of Sunday-school instruction!

◀ V. Parents ought to BE VERY CAREFUL WITH WHOM
THEIR CHILDREN ASSOCIATE.

It is a common proverb that, a man may be known by his company. I believe it is equally true that, what a child will be, depends, more than on any thing else, upon his associates.

Fathers and Mothers, you may pray for and with your children,—your houses may be schools of every virtue,—your own characters very models of piety,—and you may give your children all the advantages which this most favored age affords;—and yet one or two evil associates will frustrate all your influence and exertions. O, be careful then, for your own sake, and for your children's sake, with whom they associate! I have seen an interesting family of children under the influence of a pious parent regularly present in the house of God, and by their orderly and serious deportment there giving hopeful evidence of future excellence. > But, unhappily,

they were suffered to form intimacies with others of a different character. What a change was wrought! I have seen these once promising young persons come up again to the sanctuary with their new friends, but it was not to worship,—it was to let their eyes wander about the church in pursuit of every trifle—it was to whisper to one another, and to indulge in smiles and laughter during the most solemn services,—to the great annoyance of all about them, and especially to the great injury of those smaller children who might be sitting in the adjoining pews. Alas! I have thought, in witnessing these scenes, would that their unhappy parents would keep them at home, or else sever this connection! To treat public devotion and the preaching of the gospel with such thoughtless levity, is the surest way to harden the heart, and settle down into habits of contempt for God and religion.

When you are choosing companions for your children, endeavor to ascertain whether the parents of those towards whom your attention may be directed, are themselves people who have a respect for true religion,—whether they have a fixed place of worship to which they regularly take their families. If this be not the case, you may be certain that their children are frivolous, light-minded, and generally worse. And if you would be careful to keep the leprosy, or the plague out of your houses, be much more careful to keep out such associates: they are infinitely more dangerous than leprosy and plague combined. If once admitted, they will counteract every good effort you can make; they will destroy your children, both soul and body.

Fathers and Mothers, I have now endeavored briefly to show you, what it is to "bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" and I have urged upon you some motives for the performance of this duty,—such as your situation as parents, the importance of your influence to the character and happiness of your children, and, consequently, your solemn responsibility on their account. But there are other motives, *peculiarly christian*, which I would especially press upon you, because, without these, you will never properly discharge your duties to your children.

Consider, I beseech you, at what a price your children were bought! They "were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Every mercy, every privilege they now enjoy, comes to them through the humiliation and sufferings of him who is "God manifested in the flesh!" How fallen, how ruined, then, must they be in themselves;—and, if "God our Saviour" so loved them, how ought you to feel for them!

Consider, also, that the Holy Spirit is pledged to qualify you for your duties to your children, and bless your exertions to them: for "the promise" (of the Holy Ghost) declares the apostle, "is to you and your children." And now can you, my friends, really be followers of him who said "Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me,"—and not feel a deep and affectionate solicitude for the immortal interests of your children? Can you sincerely believe on him who is continually giving this charge to each Father and to each Mother—"Feed my lambs"—and not be "constrained by the love of Christ" to "bring them up in

the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" Surely parents, if you yourselves have been made partakers of the mercy and grace of the gospel, you will give yourselves no rest,—you will pray, you will strive, that all your children may become the children of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit,

Fathers and Mothers, does the thought at times exceedingly distress you, that some of your beloved children, through your ungodly negligence, may sink down to everlasting wo?.....But, how delightful the anticipation, which it is the privilege of the faithful parent to enjoy, that he will be enabled to say, when standing before the judgment seat of Christ: "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me!"

AMEN!



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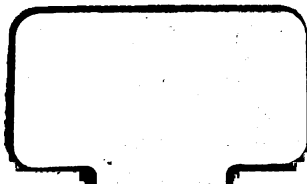
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